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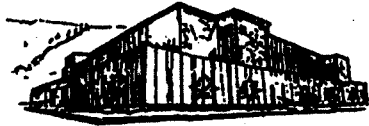
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Modicum Blue

By

Rob Schlegel

B.A. English Literature, Linfield College, 2001.

Presented in partial fulfillment
Of the requirements
For the degree of
Masters of Fine Arts.
The University of Montana
May 2004

Approved by:


Chairperson


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Date

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MODICUM BLUE

Rob Schlegel

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...and dispense to everyone his modicum of sense...

where one may float between blue and blue...

Gift

Maybe the herons say
what we say when we speak
without expectation—words
following curiosity—the path
of atmosphere the winged
call their own. Smoke billows
in the blue sky above Trapper Peak
& the rest of what we say

is sunlight in the window,
the attempt to enter
what holds us & pushes us away,

un-hatched egg tucked
in woodchips at the park—
when pierced with a needle
and drained of the vitellum
something else grows wings.
Each thing we do takes us

to the next thing we do.
This is the painting of the un-hatched egg,
the globefish flashing in current.
Time is the drift of all the globular fish—
what are we willing to waste it on?

Here are the boots for when rain
fills the birdbath, bowls
fashioned from clay, red
speckled, & all of the un-hatched
eggs nestled on roof-tops

in the middle of cities—
creek-beds stood on end.
Here are two blue herons.
Here is a map. This is where
they will go when they die.
This is what they will bring.

here/there

Pinions edging the midnight eaves, lifting
in pairs, & falling swift-tumble,
aerial-coupling, the mayflies: aerial-

plankton, sift from the fragile light;
dormers darkening with the swift's echoing:
here—the chimney's coordinate

revealed; *there*—the chimney brimmed—
vacant but for sparks; *here*—
chimney hollow, swifts funneling

in funnel-symmetry & how concentrated:
cistern, solarium. Fog's lowest ply caught
in the top branches like voile

stretched in the scarf's hitched weave.
Gravity drags snow from the low roofs,
hangs it from the eaves, soffit

atop rows of brownstones quantified
in pairs. Swift's de-chimney through
flutter-thrummed concussions of air—

born from squares of colored paper,
little birds—eyes viscous-black—
nearly alert to the moths troubling the streetlight,

the helical leaves; some settling
in the dark grass, others rising just enough
for the young girl folding

to regard the paper-like foliage
as swifts lifting from the low
branches; en-route to the city's chimneys,

containers papered in names:

cistern, solarium. The birds shirred on the table.
Outside, trees to assail the stillness

& bird's veins beginning to fill with directions
of flight, poised like human eyes
tarrying the rooftops for the chimney

swifts; wings assembled emeraldred
& black—as within—bone-pockets
filling with weightless air.

Storm, Ab Ovo &

invisible, but for the branches
breaking in wind untethered,
not ceramic holding tea or

hand holding ceramic and sip
of tea settling in stomach tissue,
endpoint of infinite perception,

perception in diluvial light, sinking
from the window, abelia trembling;
the senses, not separate until

they appear on paper as *downed*
power-lines lashing & lashed tarp tight,
not separate but serried molecules;

dirt, beginning & end, wind &
steel, water-brain within & out
of the human skin—ten-pound

organ, rain storm and roof
acoustooptic hollow-wood-stretch.
These bodies expanding, not room

reducing, not everywhere
all at once, but the space
that will be empty when I leave it.

Rain expiring & the end of.
Ankle-swivel & unlit wick,
invisible pen—but

still penning letters
upon this relic abelia, penning
black branches into pausing, this

blue raincoat hanging on blue hanger.
Sleeves hanging the way arms hang
in the absence of arms; *so still*,

this person—this room an absence
of light, this paper not paper, but
cerebral unfolding, snow-scroll,

blown & blown
in drifts, storm ab ovo—
this rain, that.

Portal

Rag of colts fringe-tipped by wind,
 & unfurling over the basin's parched terrain—
rising easterly—the fissured ridgeline

 crumbing the basin floor, boulders rolled
& rocks plangent, swath fresh scar
 & the switchgrass beneath the widening sky,

mottled foal nosing the fieldstone;
 portal into degrees difference, proscenium
arch leading the horses to shade

 in the reach of the sun-drenched
boulders; portal:
 the river's bridge we look over

from our passing cars, earth exposed
 in the scour, river's drift, road-cut
blasted with Roosevelt dynamite;

 night-crossing the bridge's south-end
where headlights invent cement
 guard-rails, a body reclined atop them,

river swift & lit by the sidewalk lights
 as meteors flash against the dark
blue sky. And we have gone on to say

 suspicion: bridge activity implying
uncertain outcomes—come the river—
 gone be the rocks, read & re-read

is the land's lilt & shift, sift of earth's
 surface, ocean & water dredging
the tops of mountains. Gone be the sludge

 from the slaughterhouse,
filling pipes beneath the city, the catfish
 lengthening in muck downstream,

where fishermen cast cable, end-gaffed
with pigeon flesh, pierced & current
pulled until the cable throbs & pickups

haul channel cats from the current
seam—algae, eddy-twisted into the river's
throbbing tumor. Whiskered thing hover

the silt bottom, navigating brusque water,
the rusting fenders, two or three dulce-
covered chassis'; the boxcar, silt-filled

& there only because we heard
the winter derailment; two cars
spin-drifting as far from the train,

skid & spark-surged over cement,
the city's southern edge & displaced
water, water removed from its sedentary hull—

vertical swelling, molecules shaping
the boxcar plunge, swallowed whole
the steel freight, portal: anything

from the chain, unchained; gone be
the clarity of entrance,
through which all description is lost.

Pend Oreille

Or the rain is already here, already flooding
the boundaries of cities sketched in sand, rain
pulling the fish from sleep as fleets of submarines

pass below I watch for the periscopes flashing.

Larches lean in wind, slight gesture—Ceres
beside herself, knee-deep in the aster and

goodnight Idaho, the lake is turning to meadow,
this breathing—accurate in emptiness—and deer
look through the eyes of fish. The ground into

which larch trees decay hastens after all
the impossible arching—some new light, suggestion:
marmoreal unmoving, periscope-flash in the distance,

cold air wafts into this room where the cedar logs
are cedar logs, then burst gills and fin through
the aqueous moon. Words energized in metered

scintilla, aster & chicory shake in wind and
rain clouds are not rain clouds,
but currents of the Atmospheric River.

Cinderpulse

Winter night, clothes strewn
in a current on the wood floor;

rain-dappled window-glass, fog
wishboned over it—midnight field

emerging in silvering light, deer
tonguing the grass, relic bunches

bent in snow, birds settling beneath
undone trees, in sky lacquered black

of Japanese wooden boxes; eye
enameling what the self softens, air

& warm air, the window publishing
fingerprints, small letters: attention

to what night tenders.

Cold air turns the dozen or so
oak leaves away from themselves

and into the shared space of store-
clerks, magpies & blueprints

of snowmen. Sifting elderberry
from the backyards of people

with first, middle and last names,
black bears cross the side streets

as the dog claws dry vines through
dry vines. In roof-top shadows,

the swallows and crows gutter,
the farm ponds and lawn chairs

plead sunlight to pull everything
it can into stillness.

As we shudder in the silences
between our tongues, do we begin

to quit our desire? Somewhere
there is a word that means forever

& never; the zinnias inherit
what our bodies cannot contain.

We fold paper into cups
that will hold the sea.

Somewhere, a blackbird is calling,
silver-lipped, something whispered.

Two Veterans on a frozen pond
pull trout from a hole the fish

mistake for the moon.
They sip bourbon, admitting

the cold and cannot imagine
the other side of the ice,

its cryptic dark. They begin to believe
the small hooks piercing the lips of fish

are not hooks but the last sentences
they will never say to their lovely sons.

Waxwing, rustlehush gathered above
ground, this undoing embers in the waiting,

paused before breath calls it into creeping—
go on embers, kindle through skin & roots—

force them up for air in the bend of bunchgrass
over rabbit tracks disappearing, fir needles,

needle deep and the waxwings carry
what they carry into evening; cinders

from summer fires embering, *go on cinders*,
settle in to root's breath—cold as the bucket

hipped from the river—this air in the tops
of trees, where little light; this hush—

something that might settle in.

Letter to William Stafford

Where to look for those reassuring
sentences, each affirming every move
as a necessary weave to some quiet fabric?
When they asked where to find the thread
you fashioned I'd like to believe you led them
to moving water. You would have liked walking
the Bitterroot with Duncan, & Hugo might have learned
where brown trout tend to feed at dusk.
The people I need are all around me.
When my father visits from Oregon, he sketches
red willows in snow. This valley is becoming smaller
& the deer are backtracking through each other's
dreams. My neighbor buries books between rows
of kale; if I find one of your poems I will call it
Dirt, Beginning & End. What I have been trying to say
is that everyone I have ever loved is still living.
Some are living slow & slipping toward the edges
& their words feel like tracks, cycling. I look
for threads you may have left between words
like *reticent & lean*, for the blue to reserve
for my private folds of cloth, how to trust
the origin of things—

Reduction

Fulvous light, rectangled
on the wood floor is moon
reduced to window frame.

Sound reduced to anechoic
is the blood's mute breath,
circulatory drone.

Coyote howl is multiplied
by howl—not four legs loping
amid thin stands of snow-covered

 pines; winter fur—tawny,
silver-pocked belly hair brushing
the snow as the wind sunders—

ears honed toward limb snapping
 & pinecones racketing frozen
ground, the sylvan mutterings.

But all of this is half-imagined.
The rest—footprint's constellating
dollops in a cerulean maze.

In our houses: the books &
the chairs that will outlive us.
Having tried to place things

 in a context of particulars;
thumbprint's narrowing details, but the print
is the hand gripping the shovel

as you dig in the bunchgrass
 for what might be your own minutes
fixed in clay. Or, you are digging

 a little grave, white & blue rocks
pebbling to the bottom
of the widening fissure, objects

separating from their objective
particulars; poisoned coyote's
yielding carcass found near

the frontage road; whiskers
tinctured pink of flavored
prussic lapped from a shallow

bowl; sound enters the body;
hammer, anvil & stirrup;
invisible but for reverberation.

August Street

Plastic hammer-crush the beetles scuttling toward cracks in the sidewalk & the last thing anyone expects is ol' man Cahill to holler from behind his screen door that the Splendid Tiger Beetles we picked from the sand boxes feed the shrikes perched in lilacs. We picked them specifically for the neighborhood time trials.

No one is late
for dinner. Trains
couple in the rusting
train yard

& there—agile Splendid Tiger Beetle—as if anticipating the coming strike—~~one~~—over the plate's outside corner; steamed asparagus hanging at the plate's edge; Spode scraped with the fork's stainless prong, & atop the kitchen counter the Mason jar—steely wings against the tin lid punctured with fork holes & outside,

plastic hammers sleep
under low
branches brushing
the fir-needles—

& the hungry boy hammer strikes—~~two~~—& ol' man Cahill whisks the plate with the horse-hair brush, umpire of neighborhood competition; & inside dinner was served then finished swift down the pipe, little orb dust-thumping the leather glove—specks settling over the flattened backs of beetles—~~three~~ &

we're out
of daylight—
as the Mason jar dries
in the wood dish-rack.

Parts of A Snowman

They are watching the television;
 outside, snowfall in the alleys
& over the gray ocean & gabled roofs—

 thick flakes settling, screen's dizzy
blue-light against walls,
 light flashing from windows

of the winterized homes, while children
 remove labels from all
the movable objects, objects

 they share because
they have been
 told to share

& told to do so many things
 under Ms. Loy's
watchful eye—eye assuming

 each picture
Michael composes suggests
 his emotional aura.

Ms. Loy wears eye-shadow
to the coffee shop, anticipating
someone of equally reckless desire.

Consider the barrista's
spry breasts, nimble hands
pressing together the shiny

instruments, coffee-
beans—reduced
to a state of helplessness.

Beached whale
in the morning's winter light
& the green-eyed boy—

buckets filled with shells—
imagines the size of the whale's
heart, the width of its pliable

veins & where they might lead
were he to crawl through—
he could, you know, he could crawl

through them like the sleeves
on his
grandfather's pea-coat.

Elementary school art is hanging
in the coffee shop:
A Celebration of Winter, little figures

standing on legs cut
from construction paper, snow patches
medley white paint & glue.

Michael has used the torn-paper
technique for the arms
& legs of a young boy—

body parts too unshapely
for scissors, too simple for the time
& energy reserved for the paper

snowflakes drifting over the boy
kneeling beside the paper-ocean,
the silhouette of some dark-

blue animal—its little eye—
half-open
on the snow-covered shore.

North Shore, St. Lawrence Island

Shifting, as if over the back of a white beast whose skin
opens to expose the ocean's rippled surface swarmed

with polar cod—belly-up—swim bladders exploded
from the rate at which the hurricane of narwhals

drove them from the Arctic's echoless depths,
like the prints from the young polar bear, small

enough to hide in the curled toes of its mother's
front paws & would, but for now—abandoned & boorish

over pack-ice—the bottled sky closing behind him
like the distance between predator & prey, or the space

amidst the ice-floe's grinding bucklehinge; so few
parts of that machine's white-vast melting in irreparable

slapping against the frozen floe upon which the bear sits
opening a small hole, legs extended like a child settled

on the floor, fettered and waiting, for the whiskered
snout of the shiny seal. Pack-ice & the turning sea

beginning to lap at the ice-floes adjusting in wind,
wind in the distance & then in your ear, silent wind

where it enters—a shout first seen through field
glasses—wind tearing through whitening ice.

Watercolor, South of Florence

They would have been olives or grapes,
or opulent rows of each, spilling over
the penciled-border beneath four or five

cerulean strokes, cumulus loosened from the sea-
dark sky, suffocated where the paper is wavy
from the painter having paused to imagine

the burdens of composing as needs
within which things are composed; the needs
within image itself, as the tree from which

the paper was fashioned needed water,
as the fields from which the family fed required
the same; image on the surface of speech,

house and hills—drought, the sun, low over
the darkening length of maples, solferino
roof above stucco, the single telephone pole,

pontific distance from these dying fields. Someone
might say he painted the image of a house, but
the house was the image of the tragedy within it.

Water Works Ridge

What pains you must take for the next
 generation of footprints in thin mud,
minute quill-pockets dazzled
 into the snow drifts—thin punctures

bluing through bantam holes, fallow-tinged hairs
 around the little mouth gnawing
at the pine-bark or a little coolant hose
 from the parked car.

§

Spring clouds, heavier in the still air,
 almost acrid
& rain in silvering walls
 waiting in line behind silvering walls.

The hot-tub's electric hum. Little rain
 spatters *Paterson*, mottled parchment.
Clouds skiff the Water Works Ridge, the one
 or two hikers running to their wounded car.

Arthur Avenue

Each week, the student whose name
I never remember, submits poems
on lined-paper, purple-ink looped

and fettered in g's and r's like
fishing knots, the scratch-paper notes
mother left in lunch bags before

and after my first erection, my first
fuck-you to Donny Maller and his
soccer-field elbows, and thinking

if James could fly in a giant peach,
I could reach Italy through the hole
I had been digging in the backyard.

How logical the unfurling
of imagination, how believable
the text-book sentences rolling

to the edges of margins, of
understanding truth-be-to-god
facts of biological discovery;

the lobster's sharp stream
of urine from under her antennae
as she approaches her lover's den;

his fickle pincers sparring until
she strips her shell submitting to his
flashing legs and mouth, turns on her back

and the rest is historical, ancient
and raw as the inch-long love darts
one slug jabs into another's head

in sleight-of-slug foreplay, hermaphroditic
and slow, as if knowing the cold pavement
would record everything in longhand.

The Ghost Boats

Come the cloud's edge
darkening in the distance
& the woman crossing
the river—right hand

securing her hat—the left
comes the children, rain
over the washed-out leaves
gathering, flat-crimson,

edged ecru beneath herons,
culled in budding
alders. Carina: the ship's
keel; Argo: its name;

ø

emerging southerly
in the night sky,
Columba Dove sent ahead
of the boat navigating

the canyon's feldspar teeth;
cliffs blazed
by unaccounted wind,
wind through wood,

rock-fractured in the cuffing air,
come the dawn
through fog's
darkest margin

merged with light
over the bluing river,
canyon's gray above
the sandbar's still air—

six or seven
alders lengthening in sun;

ø

come river-steam
half-shaded, & there—

the ghost boat
drifting—empty, save
the anchor-rope,
silvering & one oar

trailing in the shallows,
the prow lifting
& falling, gathering speed
& rattle-restless,

ever so—so convincing
itself back into
existence after miles of slow
water, come the current,

digging the cut-bank
bend in the river,
river unfurling, *river tell*
of the ship's turning

& now, days later
on the west-coast,
estuary opening,
echoless to the sky.

Reduction

The dog is barking at the nothing
in the space between the trees.
Spring air in afternoon windows

& the little man—little, because
he is old—sits in a lawn chair at the cross-walk,
lifting the chartreuse flag. Lofty intentions

& at the end of Chen's poems in Rexroth's
Chinese translations, someone penciled the words
family-mourning, family-mourning, family-mourning

until something in the brain-reducing
strayed into *family-morning*, slipped left
cerebrum penciling-in

the desire for mugs of tea;
rice-water from the sprawling
patties; things to be sure of.

8

Three or four bumble-bees
investigate the rainwater gathered on the black
plastic covering the swimming pool;

crab-apples stir over algae blooms
where tadpoles scurry beneath the floating
vermilion orbs, the leaves—cusped & air bubbles

spiraling to the surface where midges
busy into a veil. Wind advises the plastic over
the pool & a young man is describing

to the passengers on the bus,
the curve of his mare's neck, how
he calms her before opening the corral.

ρ

Single obsession—breaking note
in the act of finding
& *on-ker-ink-us*...attention to some

nuance, velvety buds pock
the wisteria vines. Are they heavier now
than when the foliage emerges?

What leads us to anticipate change?
But to impose is not to discover
the infinite disclosing itself

unswervingly, *Oncorhynchus mykiss*:
steelhead ramming into the dam's concrete
until blood ribbons downstream.

8

The dog is barking not at the nothing
we walk through
from the house to the car, but veiled rabbit;

wind from the elk's spring range.

Children are navigating potholes in the cross-walk.
Even the bright metal coining in the sun

says mind the man with the flags
waved brightly—& we move
with readiness to receive, coat-

pockets emptied & the boxes
we have folded from paper
are filled with the nothing

everywhere; volume of this
moment, everything turning
into what it is.

Susurrus

Cottonwoods scarred
by midnight beaver
unfinished

the bull moose
wanders in the moonlight
gathered in leaves

& go beaver
the river west the highway cars
bodies within occupy the space
of other headlights siege
some bird from the gabled
roof graying beneath
the clouds unhinged
& high beams upon
the wide pasture

gelding
nosing the tickle grass
one after the other are
the fence posts first
& there last in the rain

...daylight and the back yard

*Homes. In which some show of flowers
And of kitchen water holds survival's
Thin, thin radiance.*

Modicum Blue

The koi fins quietly against the algae's domical
blooms. Behind the kitchen walls, water within the water pipes.
Forsythia bird, come out

from the bell-shaped flowers,
breathe in time
with the koi & the tulip bulbs

accelerating beneath
the accelerating clouds.
Corundum: everything that shines—

day & the next day. Echo: a charm of finches,
how we talk to the animals.
April: a book of openings, leafless trees,

silica glass & diamonds, closure in the cutting;
mineral yielding & we could, couldn't we

draw these diagrams with pencils

colored bauxite & green, blue
for the children far from disturbed
by the disappearing animals—just another day

in their kingdom—
horizon by which we measure
where we have not yet happened.

Because someone
 is still using the kite in the park;
plastic sack glued to squared branches, lifting

 over the aluminum slide—the rime-covered
carapace under which
 blackbirds watch little hands

manipulate the string just so
 & the hovering object
 feels tetrahedral—

first and last flight displayed
 like an artifact & rare—
the first of its kind

 & so named
after the park in which it was discovered,
 Laurel, roots

abiding in dirt's cosmology,
loam passwords;
 itinerary for the days

and years existing in ground
as we know them—
 the earth's exhale

witnessed as fog—
 or a little of this
modicum blue light,

 a little of that,
 buried time, years
 compelling soil

just enough
 for soil to turn
time's fluid arc into leaf, body

& breath;
heliotrope here, crab-apple
 or buried sun

in the winter sky—
question the one part
of every sound

pining for a different pitch.

Blackbirds lifting
as if tethered
to the same invisible will

& pulling what it can
from the shovels & metal things against
the winterized home, the light,

all of the unmoving
and the watching,
we are here

and not here—winter leaves
shuffling over the sidewalk or
the fescue calling itself

into question—
no one knows
for certain if the world

is warming. Does everything
we have named
wish to be un-named?

Breathe away
the parts of yourself
you no longer require.

Larch tree yellowing
on the darkening hillside; touched
with fog's hollow finger; are photographs

curled on the window sill, solar-absorbed,
focus small & concentration bright
as snowflakes

over childhood fields:
& there was some lesson
in my father's voice advising I finish

the dinner cooling on my plate as I hoped
for his failed patience, his own mind
to regard the incomplete projects

of our household—
the impressionable
silt of our winter psyches—

snow builds a house on black-branched
foundations & our eyes lift
from our drawings to the heavy flakes

falling to where they are supposed
to fall: none of our sketching is worth finishing.
We should pray to the people

who die in their sleep;
to the starving animals;
an end to all the snow.

Come on sun, concede some shore
warmed out-of-season:
the end of the cold may come next,

an order to the cold
nerve endings in K's damaged foot
find each other again.

Everything is compassed
but the waxwings, the morning light
almost bright enough to say

April or the garden pond; little silver
& orange fish there, orbiting the algae globe &
there, black-bottomed, greening toward

the surface & every now and then
a gilded fish dimples what we have tried to name
precisely: surface film or epithelium.

We might begin to feel that deep within our lungs
are residual gills, amphibious atoms
existing in the distance

between the eyes, the little breaths or
the range of the reaching hand's rhythm &
change, space between the edges,

the scale measuring
a stability of minerals. Modicum
is the distance between atoms & blue

are their movements.

Body we fold our bodies into,
 sound separate from the moment the clapper
strikes the bell, silence between the seen

 and the heard
bush *we will*
 say anticipate

 the river thaw or the unfinished:
useful to those expecting an end
 to words unending: origin;

ice enameled alder branches;
 ice gathering in the wake
of my mother's footsteps
 say the world

 will end when a heron replaces
—grain by grain—the Oregon Dunes
 with Virginia Beach, the heron

stalking fish in the river shallows thawing,
 highknee on fracturing rock, highknee
on rock un-serried, approaching what rocks

 approach before they turn to *bush* gravelcloud
& rainstem—dirt unending
 as the silence we carry

like rain bucketed, warmed in the sun,
 this breathing & the snowbush seed hibernating
two-hundred years & the incomplete bodies

 of snowmen leaning like fence-posts edged
with barbed-wire, endless in its mapping
 of last-names, names re-issued

or where else:
 most of whom
we have given to the trees
as if by choice,

or this, the photograph of my mother's closed
hand, skin cedaring; & modicum quiet
curved from my mouth, the fog feeling toward

freezing, larch needles
singeing the air
unhinged—

Anything
but hushed, anything
but the way the crab-apple

whitens in the blazing sun, approaching
through the still air & slowing &
at the moment of arrival

stops;
because in this,
we believe in three conceivable impacts:

one of which
is none:
the whole apple

orbiting into the ivy backstop, lost
to rot in the summer heat;
or

apple flinched from the gasping switch,
a quarter of it saucered one or two feet
from the plate; or

apple shattered
into a thousand sun-lit pieces
the way the boy imagined it might, were the pitch

something he could handle,
& it is
& still is

as we imagine it there,
hovering
in the wide-eyed-hold &

the switch cocked & ready to scull
the curved plane
in which the apple is just

an apple: vermilion filling
in vermilion skin, but also a circle by which
the boy measures himself &

to which we see them both,
someday, extinguished
into soil &

turning into something
a little bit apple: modicum red,
a little bit April: body;

some corundum or
echo, the space
where the koi was & now

is not; how we navigate the sidewalk
explaining nothing but the spring trees,
the green tricycle, dismounted,

the one tire still turning
beneath the willow trees
on the verge.

*Once someone
Put a bowl afloat
And there for all to see, for all the children,
Even the New Englander
Was boatness. What I've seen
Is all I've found...*

Cape Perpetua

Underbelly of ocean, glaciated artifice, brief touchstones
in the lifespan of clouds, drove of words untouched & trolled

through dark water, inward reaching, says the undone self, ocean & sky
expand over ebbing in the jetties, clouds folding in cold air, the inlet

merge of water with saltwater, gravity of skin, somatic issue of white-
surge on green surface; one wave's dissonance from another's bright curl.

This deep reaching in the belly, this looming, moan cusp and murmur,
one shore removed from shore familiar, bird-song turned silence, quivered

on the branch one beat after the wren takes wing. We have moved
so little in our watching. The fisherman is collecting the estuary in the span

of his nets, not the salt air or air heavy, not driftwood, drift-light or barnacle,
but the edge of restlessness, undone seaside, boardwalk cut from Tillamook

forest, whole in its ending, its never-stop water crawl, bird flit above
the sand, wings glancing in sun & settling on the tidal shelves &

the sky wrinkles in the shapes of worn faces, light-informed, that shuffle
through estuary brine, water evolving into the glass clouds of morning,

morning in the still of the weathered stones, dappled & dampened
with the rain, breaking, small circlets into surface circlets expanding

to shore & the next & the next small orbits—paused—our bodies
become coral blooms, flora re-learning itself as *shalerazor*, *bladescrew*,

some ease attempting to shape; rote in the cartography of equatorial
un-raveling; become the water on which the orbits ride.

Notes

And dispense to everyone his modicum of sense... is from William Cowper, 1781.

...where one may float between blue and blue... is from George Eliot, 1876.

"Gift" is for Malena Mörling.

"Pend Oreille": due to its extraordinary depth, the U.S. military tests submarines in Idaho's Lake Pend Oreille.

"Cinderpulse": lacquered *black of Japanese boxes* owes something to Barry Lopez.

"Watercolor, South of Florence" is based on a painting by my father and owes something to Frederick Sommer.

"North Shore, St. Lawrence Island" is for Barry Lopez.

...day light and the back yard... is from George Oppen's poem "Antique".

"Modicum Blue": *just another day in their kingdom* owes something to Will Oldham.

Once someone / Put a bowl afloat... is from George Oppen's poem "Product".